CHAPTER 9
So the girl who received the love letter,
The girl whose secret affair with Kuonji Makio led to a child...
Was really Kuonji Ryouko, and not her sister Kyouko!?

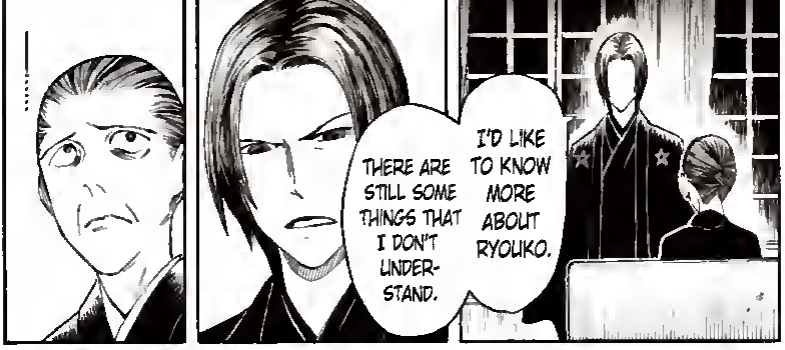
CHAPTER 9
しきがない
shikiganai
translation& typesetting by Sana

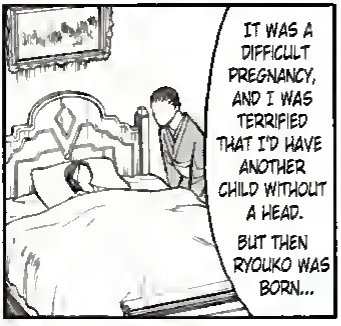
K-KIKUNO, DID YOU...
DID YOU KNOW ABOUT THIS!?
WHAT!?
ARE YOU SAYING THAT RYOUKO SLEPT WITH MAKIO-KUN!?
THEN WHEN!?
AT FIRST I DIDN'T KNOW.
AT FIRST...
TOMIKO-SAN TOLD ME THAT KYOUKO AND MAKIO-SAN HAD BEEN ARGUING, SO I WENT TO CHECK ON MY DAUGHTER.
...SEPT-EMBER.
AND THEN...

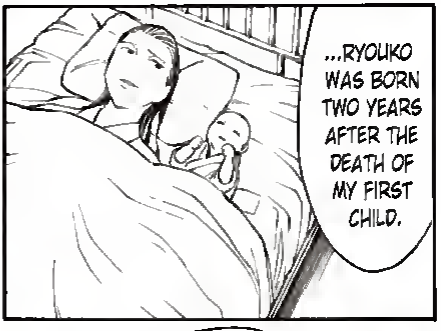
THE DOOR TO MAKIO-SAN'S LABORATORY IS OPEN...
MAKIO-SAN?
I WONDER WHERE HE IS...
A LETTER?
THAT'S RYOUKO'S HANDWRITING...
!?
December 31st, 1940.
I don't know how to tel
I think I may be pregna
ure that it's your child. I
n't know what to do... ple

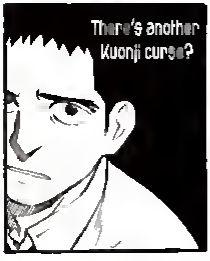
I COULDN'T BELIEVE THAT MAKIO-SAN WOULD SLEEP WITH HIS OWN WIFE'S SISTER!
AND IF MAKIO-SAN WAS THE FATHER OF RYOUKO'S CHILD...
THEN THAT MEANT THEY WERE ALREADY HAVING AN AFFAIR WHEN HE ASKED TO MARRY KYOUKO!
I BEGAN TO SUSPECT...
THAT THE TWO OF THEM WERE PLOTTING REVENGE AGAINST US.
REVENGE AGAINST THE KUONJI FAMILY.
RE-VENGE?
KYOUKO KNEW NOTHING OF THIS, OF COURSE...
SHE'D DONE NOTHING WRONG.
..ARE YOU AWARE OF ANYTHING GOING ON BETWEEN MAKIO-SAN AND YOUR SISTER?
I WAS AFRAID, SO I SPOKE TO HER...
YES, REVENGE FOR THEIR CHILD.

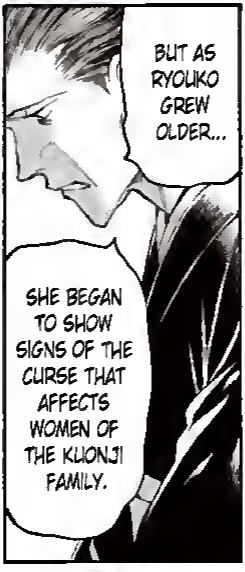
FRANKLY, MA'AM, I THINK YOUR PARANOIA IS WHAT SET OFF THIS WHOLE TRAGEDY.
AND THAT'S WHEN KYOUKO GOT SUSPICIOUS, HUH?
BUT THAT'S...
SO I DID WHAT HAD TO BE DONE...
YOU ACTED LIKE YOU DIDN'T WANT TO HEAR ABOUT IT!
...WHY DIDN'T YOU TELL ME?
IT SOUNDS LIKE YOU'VE BEEN KEEPING A LOT OF SECRETS.
WELL, MA'AM...


I'D LIKE TO KNOW MORE ABOUT RYOUKO.
THERE ARE STILL SOME THINGS THAT I DON'T UNDER-STAND.

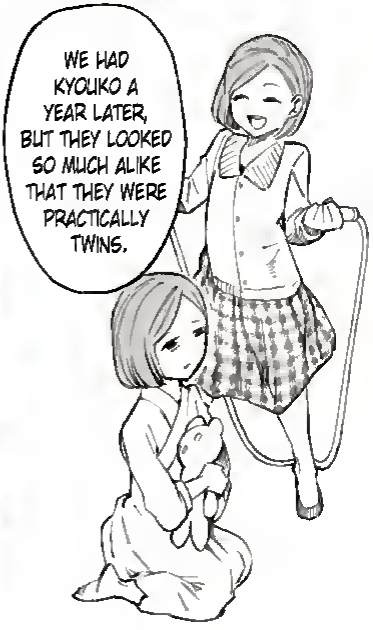

IT WAS A DIFFICULT PREGNANCY, AND I WAS TERRIFIED THAT I'D HAVE ANOTHER CHILD WITHOUT A HEAD.
BUT THEN RYOUKO WAS BORN...


...RYOUKO WAS BORN TWO YEARS AFTER THE DEATH OF MY FIRST CHILD.


There's another Kuonji curse?

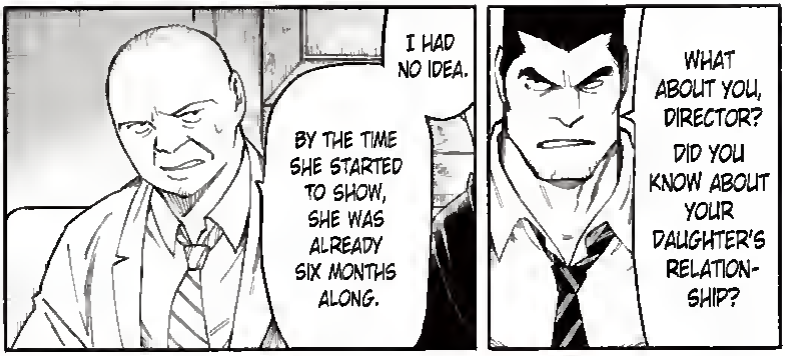

BUT AS RYOUKO GREW OLDER...
SHE BEGAN TO SHOW SIGNS OF THE CURSE THAT AFFECTS WOMEN OF THE KUONJI FAMILY.

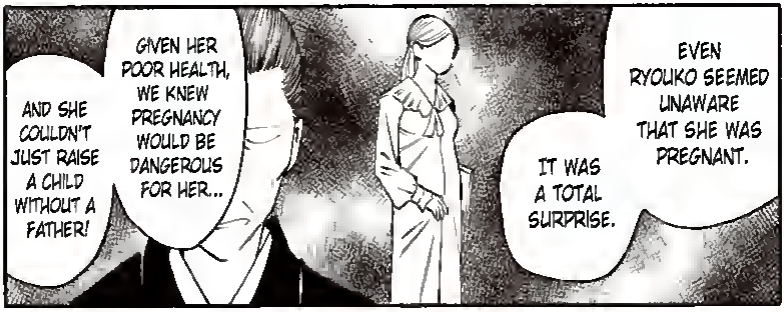
WHAT SORT OF SIGNS?

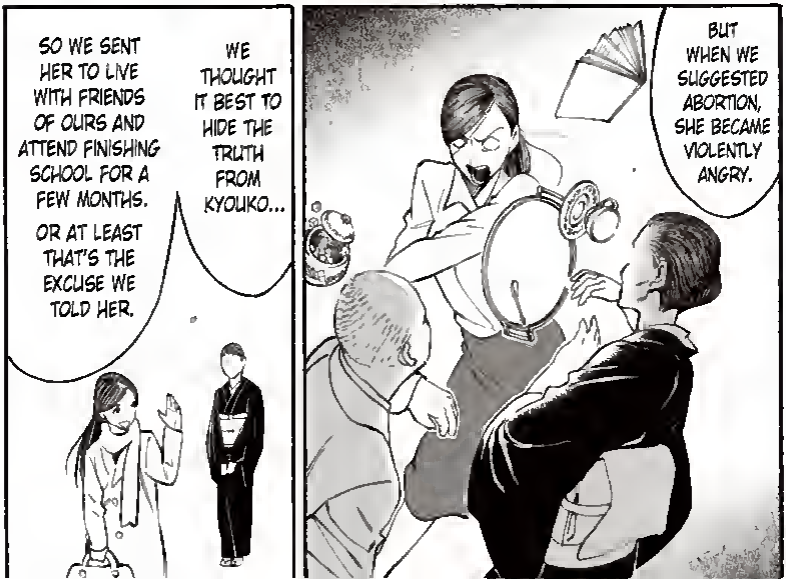

WE HAD KYOUKO A YEAR LATER, BUT THEY LOOKED SO MUCH ALIKE THAT THEY WERE PRACTICALLY TWINS.

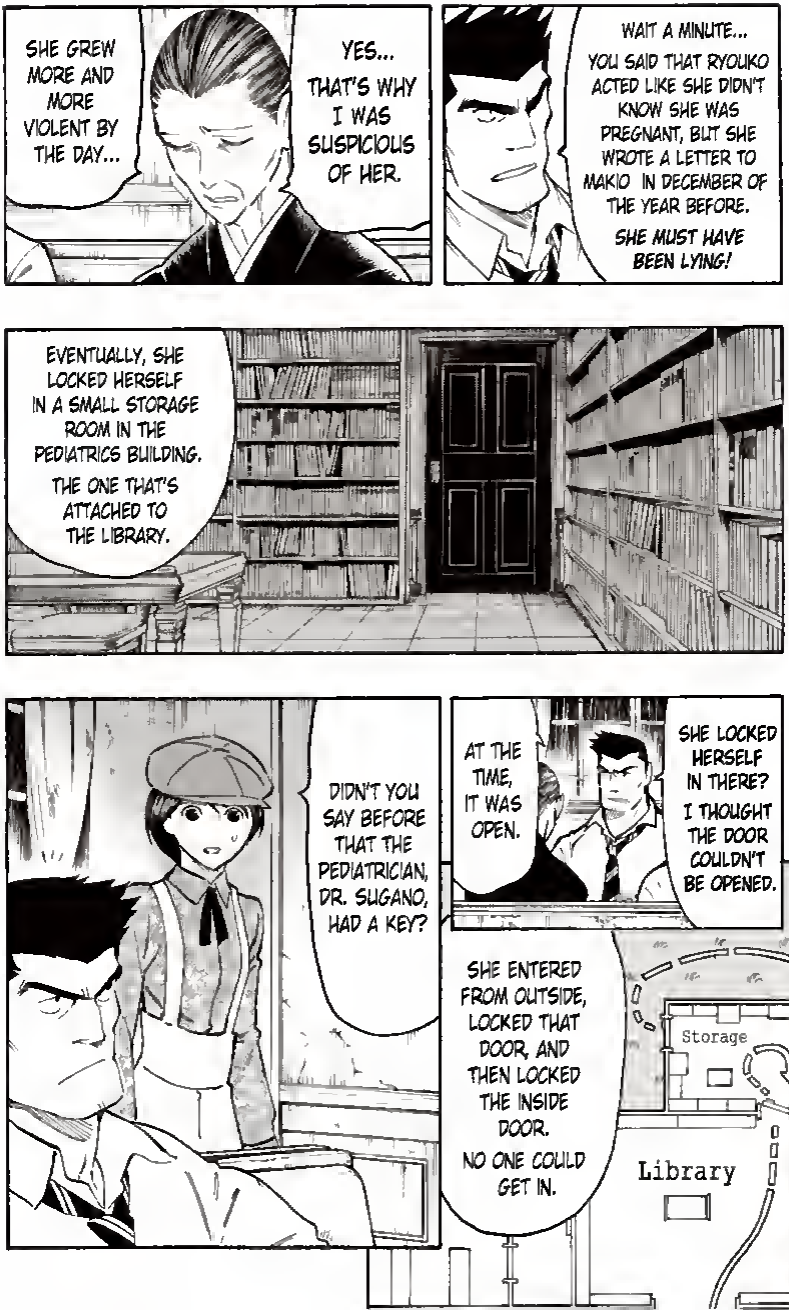
SHE SUDDENLY BEGAN HAVING SPELLS OF MADNESS.
SO THAT'S SOME KIND OF CURSE?
I NEVER HAD IT... BUT MY GRAND-MOTHER DID.
SHE SEEMED DISORIENTED, ALMOST HOLLOW...
WHEN MY GRAND-MOTHER HAD ONE OF THESE SPELLS SHE WOULD CRY OUT IN AN INHUMAN VOICE, AND SAY THINGS THAT NO ONE COULD UNDER-STAND.
DID YOUR DAUGHTERS HAVE A [illegible] RELATION-SHIP?
WELL, IN TERMS OF PERSONALITY, THEY WERE VERY DIFFERENT. RYOUKO HAD A STRANGE AIR OF MATURITY TO HER. BUT KYOUKO ALWAYS LOOKED OUT FOR HER WEAKER SISTER, AND AS FAR AS I KNOW, THEY GOT ALONG WELL.
BUT THEN RYOUKO BECAME PREGNANT...
It sounds like she was possessed..

RYOUKO WAS ACTING NORMALLY AT THE TIME, SO I HAD NO IDEA.
RYOUKO WAS OFTEN SICK... EVEN HER FIRST PERIOD CAME LATE.
I THINK KYOUKO HAD HERS FIRST, ACTUALLY.
...SO YOU DIDN'T KNOW THAT YOUR DAUGHTER WAS SEEING A MAN?
Red...
Could that have been her first period?
Of red...
A single line...

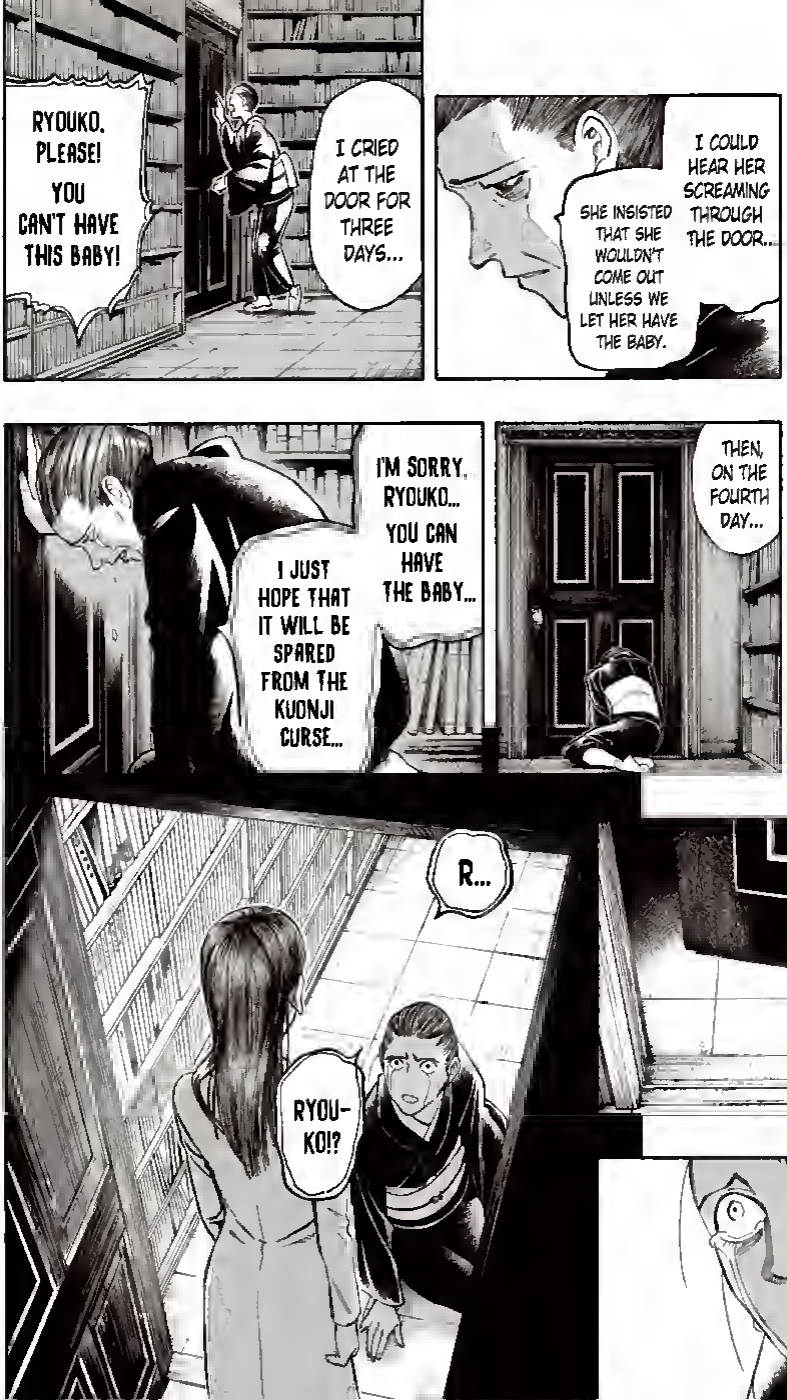

I HAD NO IDEA.
BY THE TIME SHE STARTED TO SHOW, SHE WAS ALREADY SIX MONTHS ALONG.
WHAT ABOUT YOU, DIRECTOR?
DID YOU KNOW ABOUT YOUR DAUGHTER'S RELATION-SHIP?


AND SHE COULDN'T JUST RAISE A CHILD WITHOUT A FATHER!
GIVEN HER POOR HEALTH, WE KNEW PREGNANCY WOULD BE DANGEROUS FOR HER...
IT WAS A TOTAL SURPRISE.
EVEN RYOUKO SEEMED UNAWARE THAT SHE WAS PREGNANT.


SO WE SENT HER TO LIVE WITH FRIENDS OF OURS AND ATTEND FINISHING SCHOOL FOR A FEW MONTHS.
OR AT LEAST THAT'S THE EXCUSE WE TOLD HER.
WE THOUGHT IT BEST TO HIDE THE TRUTH FROM KYOUKO...
BUT WHEN WE SUGGESTED ABORTION, SHE BECAME VIOLENTLY ANGRY.

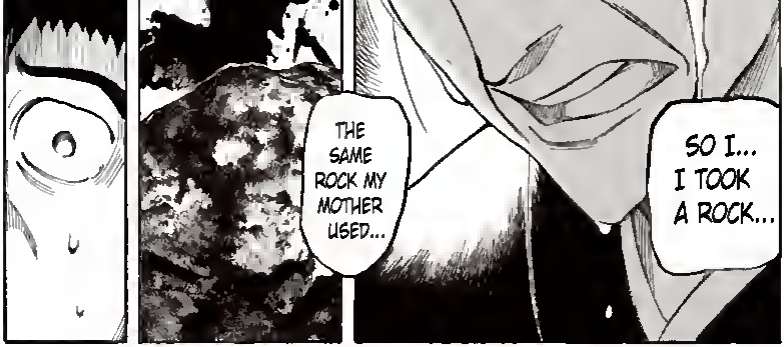

SHE GREW MORE AND MORE VIOLENT BY THE DAY...
YES... THAT'S WHY I WAS SUSPICIOUS OF HER.
WAIT A MINUTE... YOU SAID THAT RYOUKO ACTED LIKE SHE DIDN'T KNOW SHE WAS PREGNANT, BUT SHE WROTE A LETTER TO MAKIO IN DECEMBER OF THE YEAR BEFORE.
SHE MUST HAVE BEEN LYING!
EVENTUALLY, SHE LOCKED HERSELF IN A SMALL STORAGE ROOM IN THE PEDIATRICS BUILDING.
THE ONE THAT'S ATTACHED TO THE LIBRARY.
DIDN'T YOU SAY BEFORE THAT THE PEDIATRICIAN, DR. SUGANO, HAD A KEY?
AT THE TIME, IT WAS OPEN.
SHE LOCKED HERSELF IN THERE?
I THOUGHT THE DOOR COULDN'T BE OPENED.
SHE ENTERED FROM OUTSIDE, LOCKED THAT DOOR, AND THEN LOCKED THE INSIDE DOOR.
NO ONE COULD GET IN.
Storage
Library

OI, SEKIGUCHI! YOU TOLD ME THAT THIS SUGANO GUY DIED IN THE WAR, AND THAT THE STORAGE ROOM HADN'T BEEN OPENED SINCE!
SUGANO? HE VANISHED WITHOUT A TRACE.
I GUESS HE NEVER RETURNED HIS KEY.
Huh?
T-THAT'S WHAT RYOUKO-SAN TOLD ME...
EH? SUGANO DIDN'T DIE IN THE WAR.
HE JUST DISAPPEARED RIGHT AROUND THE TIME THAT MAKIO-KUN CAME HERE TO PROPOSE.
WE COULDN'T OFFER PEDIATRIC SERVICES WITHOUT A PEDIATRICIAN, SO WE DECIDED TO SHUT DOWN THE WHOLE WARD.
WHAT HAPPENED AFTER RYOUKO-SAN LOCKED HERSELF IN THAT ROOM?
SO RYOUKO LIED ABOUT THAT TOO!?


RYOUKO, PLEASE!
YOU CAN'T HAVE THIS BABY!
I CRIED AT THE DOOR FOR THREE DAYS...
I COULD HEAR HER SCREAMING THROUGH THE DOOR...
SHE INSISTED THAT SHE WOULDN'T COME OUT UNLESS WE LET HER HAVE THE BABY.
I'M SORRY, RYOUKO...
YOU CAN HAVE THE BABY...
I JUST HOPE THAT IT WILL BE SPARED FROM THE KUONJI CURSE...
THEN, ON THE FOURTH DAY...
R...
RYOU-KO!?

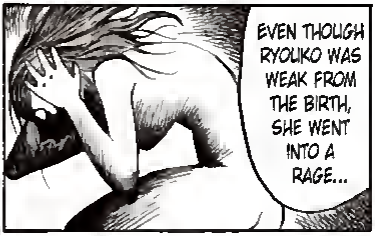
Oh Mother, I'm so happy! I wonder if it will be a boy or a girl?
.....
I'll have to start thinking of names!
Fufufu, this will be fun!
AND THEN...
IN THE SUMMER...
RYOUKO DELIVERED HER CHILD IN THAT ROOM.

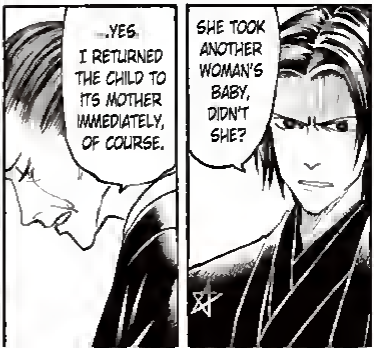
HER CHILD WAS BORN WITHOUT A HEAD.

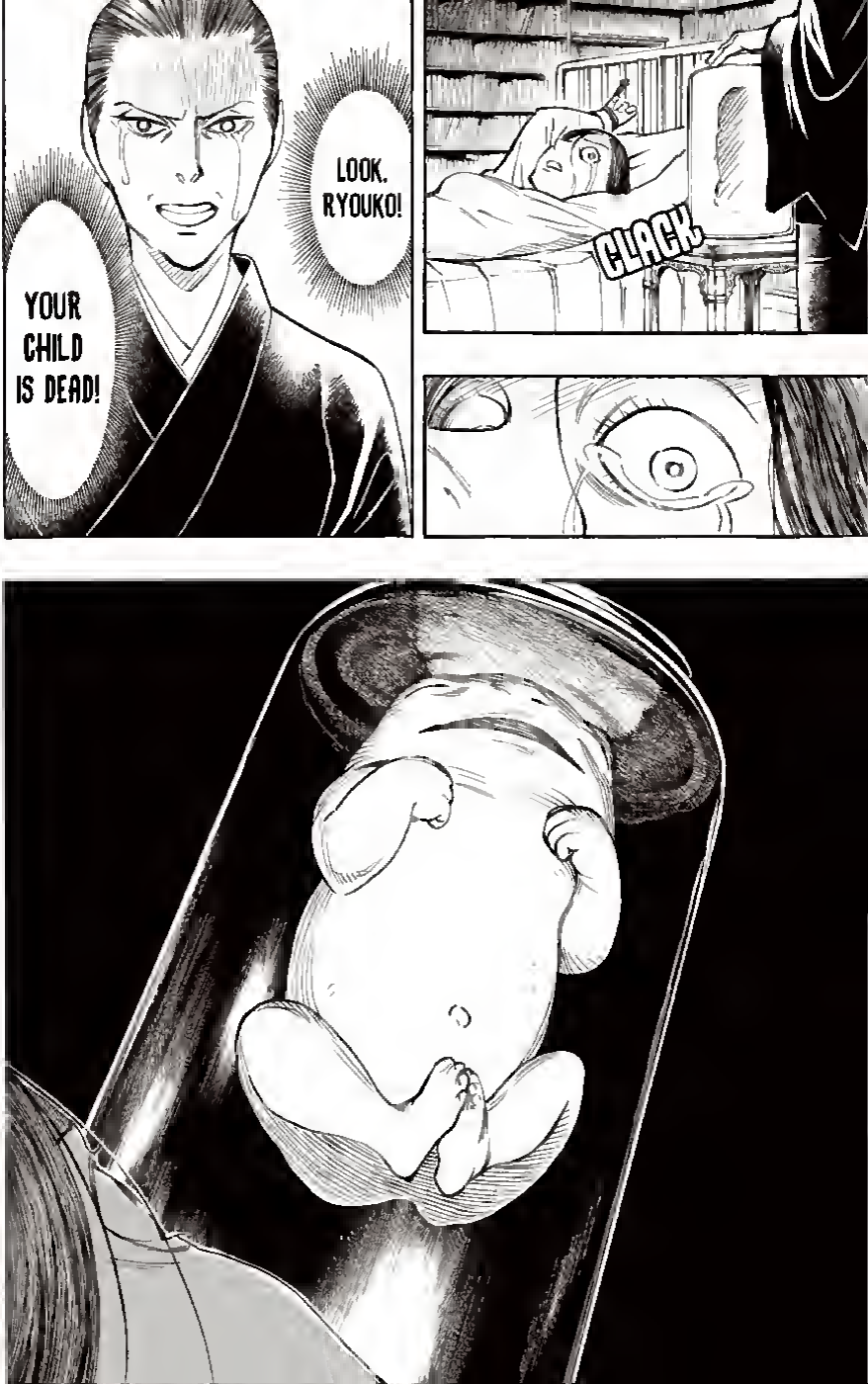

THE SAME ROCK MY MOTHER USED...
SO I... I TOOK A ROCK...

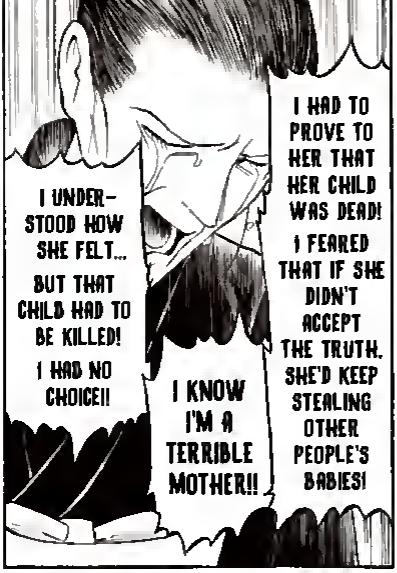
I DID WHAT HAD TO BE DONE.
AND I KILLED IT.

I COULDN'T LET HER MAKE THE SAME MISTAKE I DID...
MY HUSBAND AND I HAD TO TIE HER TO THE BED.
AND THEN I...


EVEN THOUGH RYOUKO WAS WEAK FROM THE BIRTH, SHE WENT INTO A RAGE...

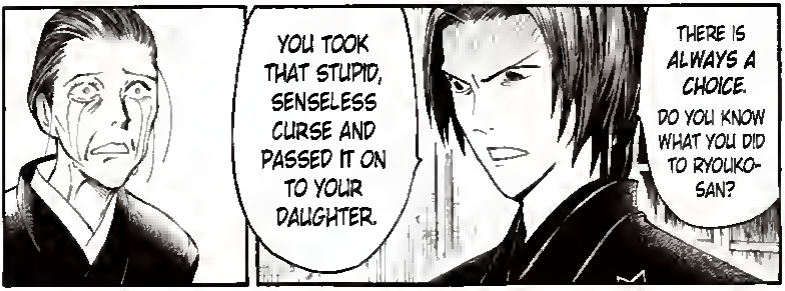

...YES. I RETURNED THE CHILD TO ITS MOTHER IMMEDIATELY, OF COURSE.
SHE TOOK ANOTHER WOMAN'S BABY, DIDN'T SHE?

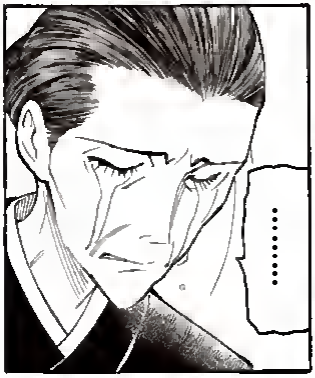

LOOK, RYOUKO!
YOUR CHILD IS DEAD!
CLACK


I UNDERSTOOD HOW SHE FELT...
BUT THAT CHILD HAD TO BE KILLED!
I HAD NO CHOICE!!
I KNOW I'M A TERRIBLE MOTHER!!
I HAD TO PROVE TO HER THAT HER CHILD WAS DEAD!
I FEARED THAT IF SHE DIDN'T ACCEPT THE TRUTH, SHE'D KEEP STEALING OTHER PEOPLE'S BABIES!

AND YOU PUT IT NEXT TO HER PILLOW!?
YOU... YOU PRESERVED HER MURDERED BABY IN FORMALDEHYDE...

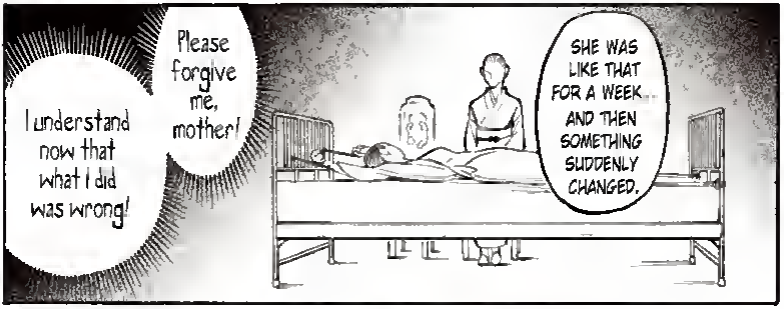
THAT'S HORRIBLE!!

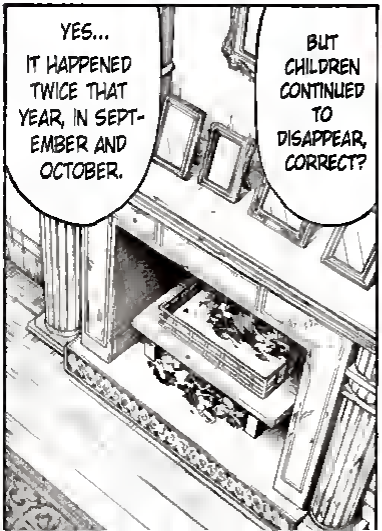

YOU TOOK THAT STUPID, SENSELESS CURSE AND PASSED IT ON TO YOUR DAUGHTER.
THERE IS ALWAYS A CHOICE.
DO YOU KNOW WHAT YOU DID TO RYOUKO-SAN?

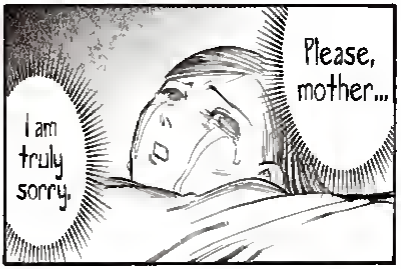

.....

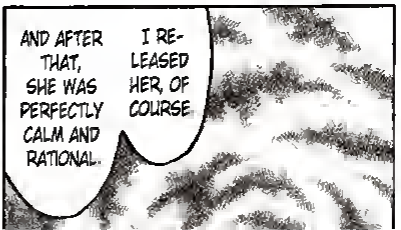
BUT WHAT'S DONE IS DONE.
YOU COULD HAVE SHOWN HER A MOTHER'S AFFECTION AND ACCEPTANCE.
YOU COULD HAVE SHOWN HER THE STRENGTH AND COURAGE TO REJECT THE OLD WAYS
IF YOU HAD ONLY BEEN ABLE TO LOVE YOUR DAUGHTER, NONE OF THIS WOULD HAVE HAPPENED!

YOUR LITTLE LOVE AFFAIR DOOMED THIS POOR CHILD!
LOOK AT WHAT YOU'VE DONE, RYOUKO! THIS IS THE RESULT OF YOUR SINFUL LUST!
AHHH!!
AHHH!!
I STAYED BY HER SIDE WHILE SHE SCREAMED...


I understand now that what I did was wrong!
Please forgive me, mother!
SHE WAS LIKE THAT FOR A WEEK... AND THEN SOMETHING SUDDENLY CHANGED.


YES... IT HAPPENED TWICE THAT YEAR, IN SEPTEMBER AND OCTOBER.
BUT CHILDREN CONTINUED TO DISAPPEAR, CORRECT?


I am truly sorry.
Please, mother...


AND AFTER THAT, SHE WAS PERFECTLY CALM AND RATIONAL.
I RELEASED HER, OF COURSE

I SUSPECTED THAT HER LOVER MIGHT BE DOING IT TO GET REVENGE ON US. BUT THEN THE WAR STARTED. AND WE LOST TRACK OF THINGS...
RYOUKO DIDN'T TAKE THOSE CHILDREN!
THERE WAS NO INDICATION THAT SHE WAS INVOLVED IN ANY WAY!
SO THERE WERE EVEN MORE KIDNAPPINGS!?
PLEASE WAIT, INSPECTOR!
I THOUGHT THAT SHE AND MAKIO-SAN WERE CONSPIRING TO MURDER CHILDREN AND RUIN THE KUONJI FAMILY...
AFTER THE FIRST BABY WENT MISSING THAT SUMMER, I FOUND THE LETTER AND BEGAN TO SUSPECT RYOUKO.
WHAT ABOUT THE MORE RECENT CASES?
YOU PAID A LOT OF MONEY TO COVER THOSE UP, RIGHT?
SO I USED THE MONEY THAT MAKIO-SAN BROUGHT TO PAY OFF THE VICTIMS.
I KNEW THAT THE PUBLICITY WOULD HARM KYOUKO THE MOST...
POOR, INNOCENT KYOUKO, WHO HAD BEEN ABANDONED BY HER HUSBAND.
AND THEN THE POLICE INVESTIGATION BEGAN.

I JUST TOLD THEM THAT THEIR BABIES WERE STILLBORN. THAT'S ALL...
I... I SWEAR I DID NOTHING LIKE THAT!
AND YOU DRUGGED THE MOTHERS OF THOSE MISSING CHILDREN, DIDN'T YOU?
NOW THAT YOU MENTION IT, THOSE MOTHERS WERE ACTING STRANGE...
ALMOST AS IF THEY'D BEEN DRUGGED...
THEY ALL QUIT FOR PERSONAL REASONS.
NO...
HMM
WHAT ABOUT THE WITNESSES? WERE YOU THE ONE WHO FIRED THE NURSES?
I... I SWEAR I KNEW NOTHING OF THIS!
GASP

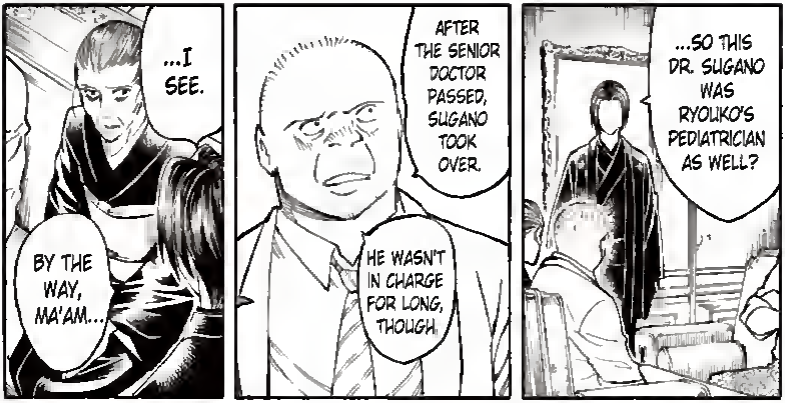
MY WIFE HANDLES THE FINANCES...
THE MONEY WAS MEANT AS AN APOLOGY.
WHAT ABOUT THE MONEY YOU GAVE THEM?
THAT WAS HUSH MONEY, WASN'T IT?
WHAT ABOUT TODA SUMIE?
IT SOUNDED LIKE SUMIE KNEW ALL ALONG THAT YOUR DAUGHTER HAD KILLED THOSE BABIES...
WAS THAT WHY YOU HAD HER KILLED?
AN APO-LOGY?
That sounds fishy... but why lie now?
SIGH
WE DIDN'T EVEN KNOW THAT SHE'D COME BACK TO TOKYO...
SHE WAS FOUND IN IKE-BUKURO.
DEAD!? I THOUGHT SHE WENT HOME TO TOYAMA.

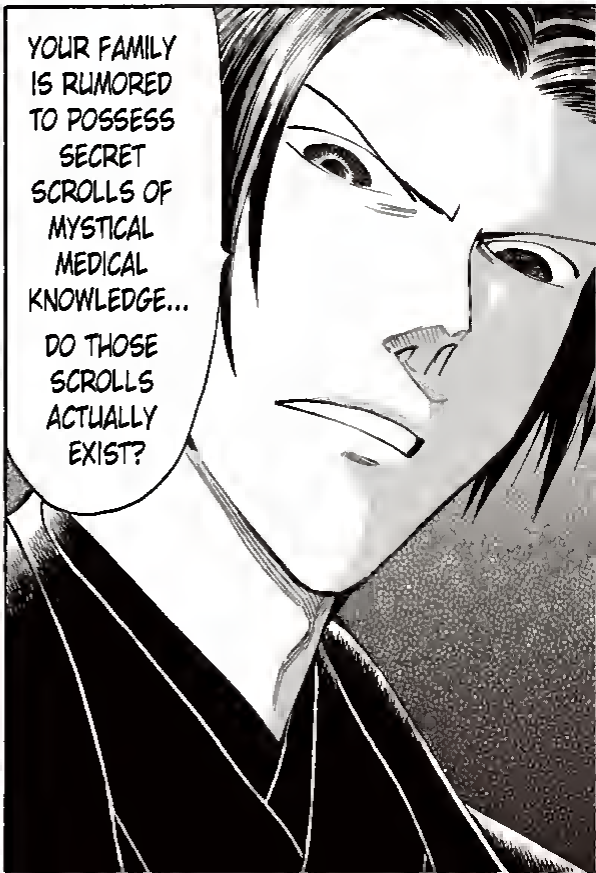
DID SUMIE-SAN AND RYOUKO-SAN HAVE A CLOSE RELATIONSHIP?
SO YOU REALLY DIDN'T KNOW...
SUMIE-SAN WAS ALWAYS A BIT ODD, BUT SHE TOOK SUCH GOOD CARE OF RYOUKO WHEN SHE WAS ILL...
SO I THINK SHE WAS PROBABLY CLOSER TO RYOUKO THAN ANY OF THE OTHER NURSES.
?
I SEE.

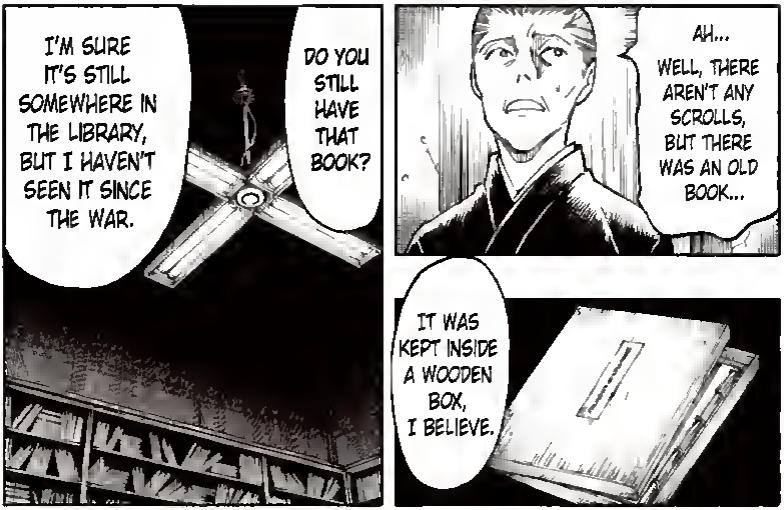
I THOUGHT...
I THOUGHT THAT MAKIO-SAN WAS TRYING TO DO THE SAME THING TO KYOUKO THAT HE'D DONE TO RYOUKO...
BUT RYOUKO SAID NOTHING ABOUT IT.
MAKIO-SAN DISAPPEARED, AND WE DISCOVERED THAT KYOUKO WAS PREGNANT...
AND THEN, JUST AFTER THE NEW YEAR...
I WAS RELIEVED WHEN THE VICTIMS DROPPED THEIR CASE AGAINST US, BUT WE WERE SHORT ON MONEY AND THE STRAIN ON OUR FAMILY GREW WORSE AND WORSE.
I THOUGHT THAT NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENED, AT LEAST IT WOULD ALL BE OVER IN NINE MONTHS...
BUT I WAS WRONG.
I HAD TERRIBLE DREAMS OF HAVING TO KILL KYOUKO'S CHILD...
DAY BY DAY, KYOUKO'S STOMACH GREW LARGER...
IT FELT LIKE A REPEAT OF TEN YEARS AGO.
I WAS CERTAIN THAT MAKIO-SAN WAS CURSING HER...
KYOUKO'S PREGNANCY CONTINUED.

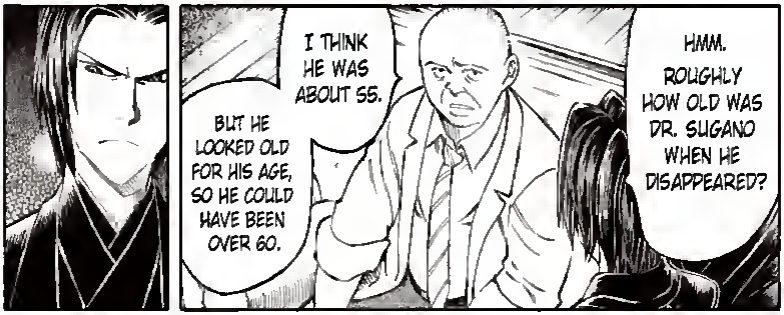
...I THINK I UNDERSTAND THE SITUATION NOW.
RUSTLE
THE CASE IS LIKE A JIGSAW PUZZLE...
AND THERE'S JUST ONE PIECE STILL MISSING.

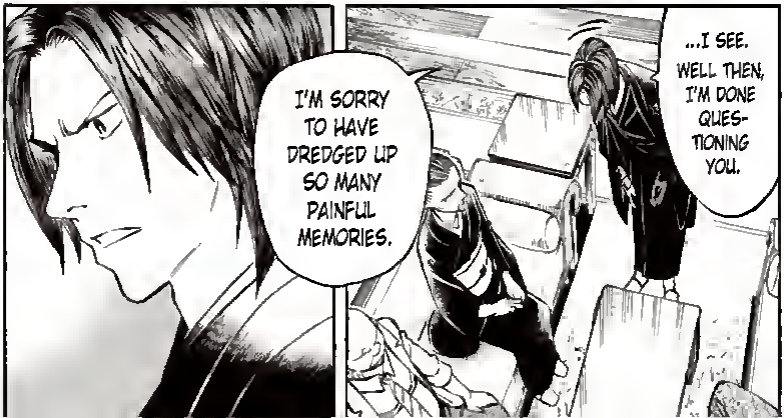
!
DIRECTOR, CAN YOU TELL ME MORE ABOUT YOUR FORMER PEDIATRICIAN?
DR. SUGANO WAS HIS NAME, CORRECT? WHAT SORT OF MAN WAS HE?
AH. WELL, ORIGINALLY, THE HEAD OF PEDIATRICS HERE WAS A DOCTOR WHO'D GRADUATED FROM THE SAME SCHOOL A FEW YEARS AHEAD OF ME.
SUGANO STARTED OUT AS HIS ASSISTANT, BUT WHEN THE SENIOR DOCTOR DIED IN 1932, HE TOOK OVER AS HEAD OF PEDIATRICS.
WHAT SORT OF REPUTATION?
WELL . HE HAD A BIT OF A BAD REPUTATION, SO I ADMIT THAT WHEN HE VANISHED, I DIDN'T PUT MUCH EFFORT INTO FINDING HIM.
I SEE...
AND WHAT WAS HE LIKE AS A PERSON?
EVENTUALLY, I GAVE HIM A KEY.
HE WAS VERY INTERESTED IN OUR FAMILY'S COLLECTION OF BOOKS...
HE SPENT A LOT OF TIME IN THE LIBRARY.
IT WAS JUST A RUMOR, OF COURSE, BUT STILL.
...HE WAS A BIT TOO FRIENDLY.
ESPECIALLY WITH LITTLE GIRLS.


...I SEE.
BY THE WAY, MA'AM...
AFTER THE SENIOR DOCTOR PASSED, SUGANO TOOK OVER.
HE WASN'T IN CHARGE FOR LONG, THOUGH.
...SO THIS DR. SUGANO WAS RYOUKO'S PEDIATRICIAN AS WELL?

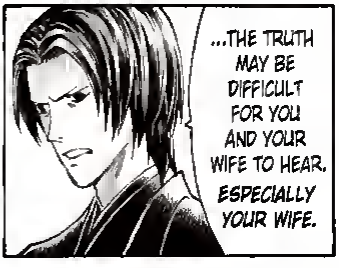

YOUR FAMILY IS RUMORED TO POSSESS SECRET SCROLLS OF MYSTICAL MEDICAL KNOWLEDGE...
DO THOSE SCROLLS ACTUALLY EXIST?

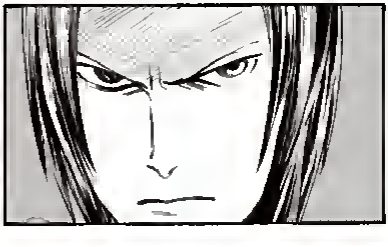

DO YOU STILL HAVE THAT BOOK?
I'M SURE IT'S STILL SOMEWHERE IN THE LIBRARY, BUT I HAVEN'T SEEN IT SINCE THE WAR.
AH... WELL, THERE AREN'T ANY SCROLLS, BUT THERE WAS AN OLD BOOK...
IT WAS KEPT INSIDE A WOODEN BOX, I BELIEVE.


HMM. ROUGHLY HOW OLD WAS DR. SUGANO WHEN HE DISAPPEARED?
I THINK HE WAS ABOUT 55.
BUT HE LOOKED OLD FOR HIS AGE, SO HE COULD HAVE BEEN OVER 60.


...I SEE. WELL THEN, I'M DONE QUES-TIONING YOU.
I'M SORRY TO HAVE DREDGED UP SO MANY PAINFUL MEMORIES.

JUST A MOMENT, MR...
BUT FOR NOW, I DOUBT THAT THOSE TWO CAN GIVE US ANY MORE INFORMATION.
CONTINUING TO QUESTION THEM WOULD BE CRUEL.
BUT I DO, AND I INTEND TO EXPLAIN IT TO YOU.
WAIT A MINUTE! I STILL DON'T KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON!!
I...
WELL THEN, CHUUZENJI-SAN, WOULD YOU MIND EXPLAINING THINGS TO ME?
I AM CHUUZENJI AKIHIKO.
AH, THAT'S RIGHT, I FORGOT TO INTRODUCE MYSELF.
RIGHT, KIKUNO?
I THINK WE NEED TO KNOW.

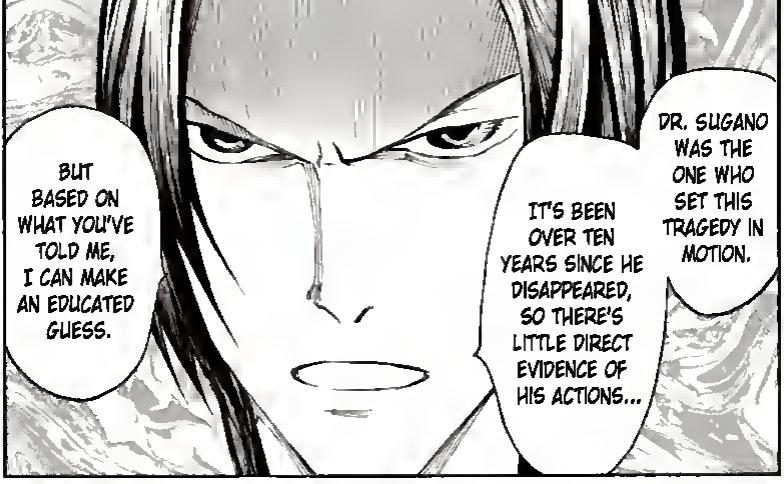




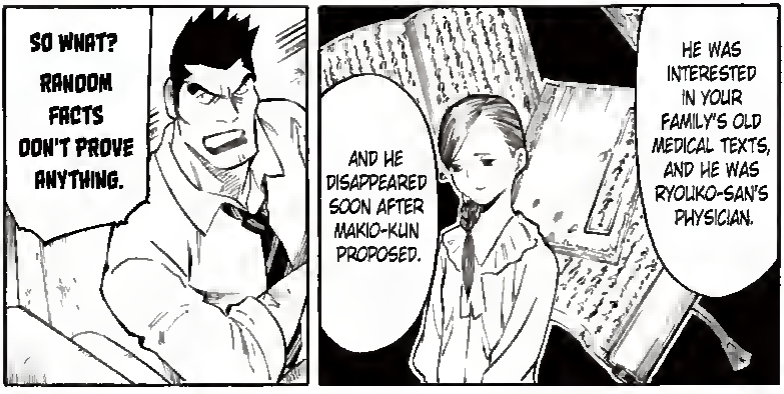
He's going to tell us
what Ryouko-san did...

Even though deep down,
we all already know the truth.

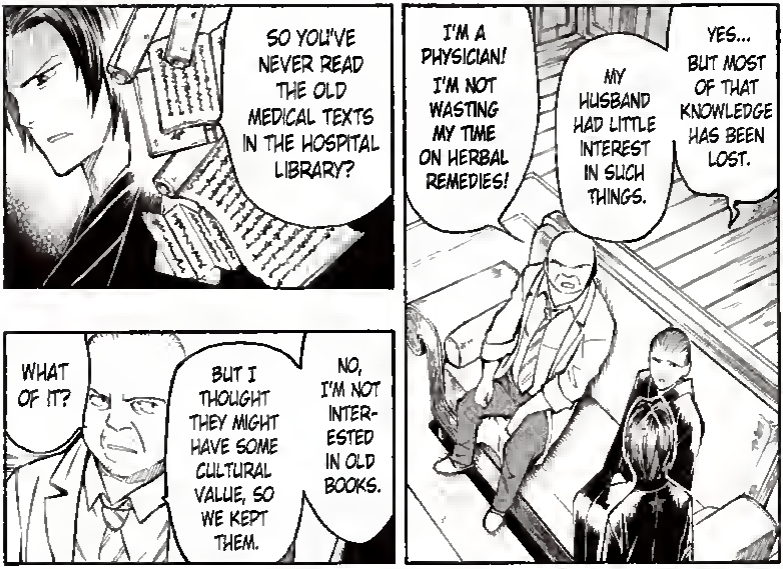
UNTIL NOW, THERE WAS ONE THING I COULDN'T FIGURE OUT:
WHO DELIVERED RYOUKO-SAN'S LETTER TO MAKIO-KUN?
IN HIS DIARY, HE MENTIONS THAT AN "OLD MAN" BROUGHT IT.
BUT NOW... I THINK IT MUST HAVE BEEN DR. SUGANO.
AT FIRST I THOUGHT HE MEANT TOKIZOU-SAN, BUT HE WAS FAR TOO LOYAL...
IF HE'D KNOWN ABOUT AN AFFAIR, HE WOULD HAVE TOLD YOU.
SUGANO? BUT WHAT DOES HE HAVE TO DO WITH ALL THIS?
ANYWAY, HE WASN'T EVEN THAT OLD.

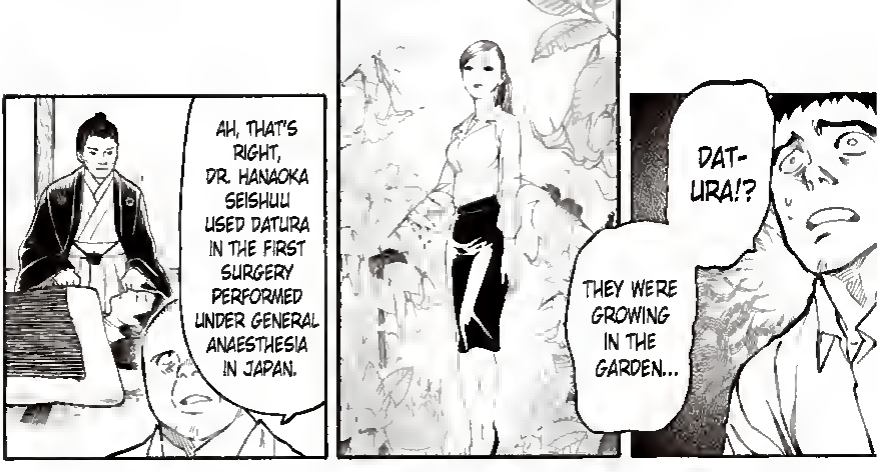

DR. SUGANO WAS THE ONE WHO SET THIS TRAGEDY IN MOTION.
IT'S BEEN OVER TEN YEARS SINCE HE DISAPPEARED, SO THERE'S LITTLE DIRECT EVIDENCE OF HIS ACTIONS...
BUT BASED ON WHAT YOU'VE TOLD ME, I CAN MAKE AN EDUCATED GUESS.

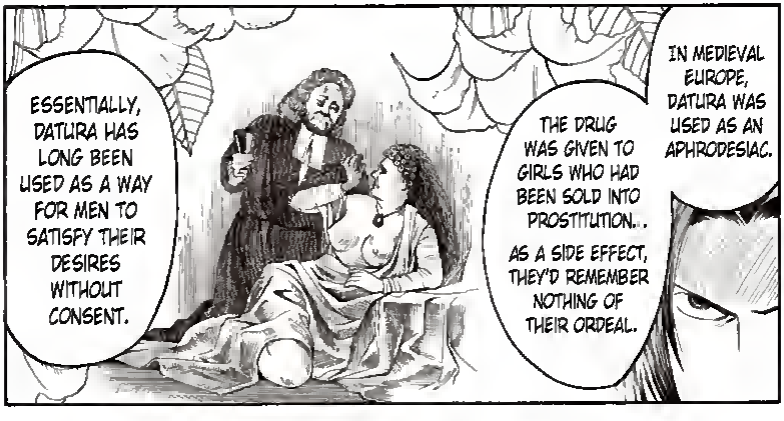
AS YOU SAID, HE LOOKED OLDER THAN HE ACTUALLY WAS.
AND IT'S POSSIBLE THAT HE WAS A PEDOPHILE WITH A FETISH FOR YOUNG GIRLS.

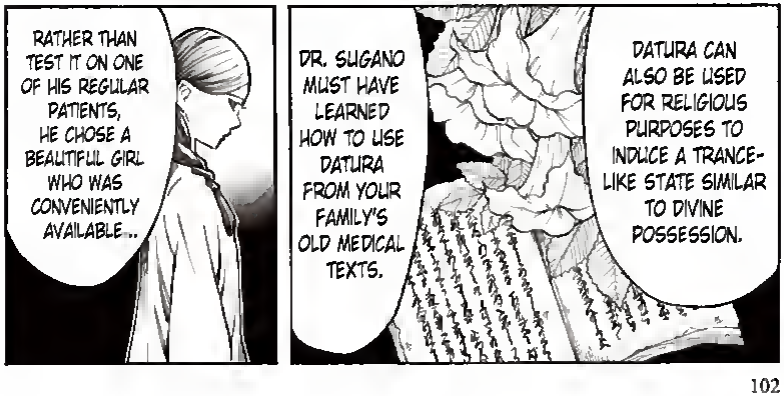

HE WAS INTERESTED IN YOUR FAMILY'S OLD MEDICAL TEXTS, AND HE WAS RYOUKO-SAN'S PHYSICIAN.
AND HE DISAPPEARED SOON AFTER MAKIO-KUN PROPOSED.
SO WHAT? RANDOM FACTS DON'T PROVE ANYTHING.

WE CAN'T BE SURE WHAT KIND OF MAN DR.SUGANO WAS, BUT I THINK IT'S SAFE TO SAY THAT HE WAS A DEVIANT.
TO SATISFY HIS URGES, IT'S QUITE LIKELY THAT HE COMMITTED CRIMINAL ACTS.
SO HE WAS A CHILD MOLESTOR!?
OF COURSE, IF IT BECAME KNOWN THAT HE WAS MOLESTING HIS PATIENTS, HIS CAREER WOULD HAVE BEEN RUINED.
BUT SUCH DESIRES ARE DIFFICULT TO CONTROL.
SO DR. SUGANO CAME UP WITH A PLAN.
HIS VICTIMS WERE CHILDREN... SO IF HE COULD KEEP THEM FROM REMEMBERING WHAT HAPPENED, HE WOULDN'T BE CAUGHT
WELL IT'S A GOOD THING THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE! THE WORLD WOULD BE FULL OF RAPISTS IF IT WERE THAT EASY!
THE KUONJI FAMILY IS SAID TO BE SKILLED IN THE ART OF HERBAL MEDICINE...
AND THERE ARE MEDICINAL HERBS GROWING ON THE HOSPITAL GROUNDS.
THESE TECHNIQUES HAVE BEEN PASSED DOWN IN YOUR FAMILY,
COR-RECT?


SO YOU'VE NEVER READ THE OLD MEDICAL TEXTS IN THE HOSPITAL LIBRARY?
I'M A PHYSICIAN! I'M NOT WASTING MY TIME ON HERBAL REMEDIES!
MY HUSBAND HAD LITTLE INTEREST IN SUCH THINGS.
YES... BUT MOST OF THAT KNOWLEDGE HAS BEEN LOST.
WHAT OF IT?
BUT I THOUGHT THEY MIGHT HAVE SOME CULTURAL VALUE, SO WE KEPT THEM.
NO, I'M NOT INTERESTED IN OLD BOOKS.
DR. SUGANO MUST HAVE STUDIED THE SECRETS OF THE KUONJI FAMILY'S HERBAL MEDICINES...
I SUSPECT THAT HE LEARNED HOW TO CREATE A POWERFUL SEDATIVE FROM DATURA FLOWERS.

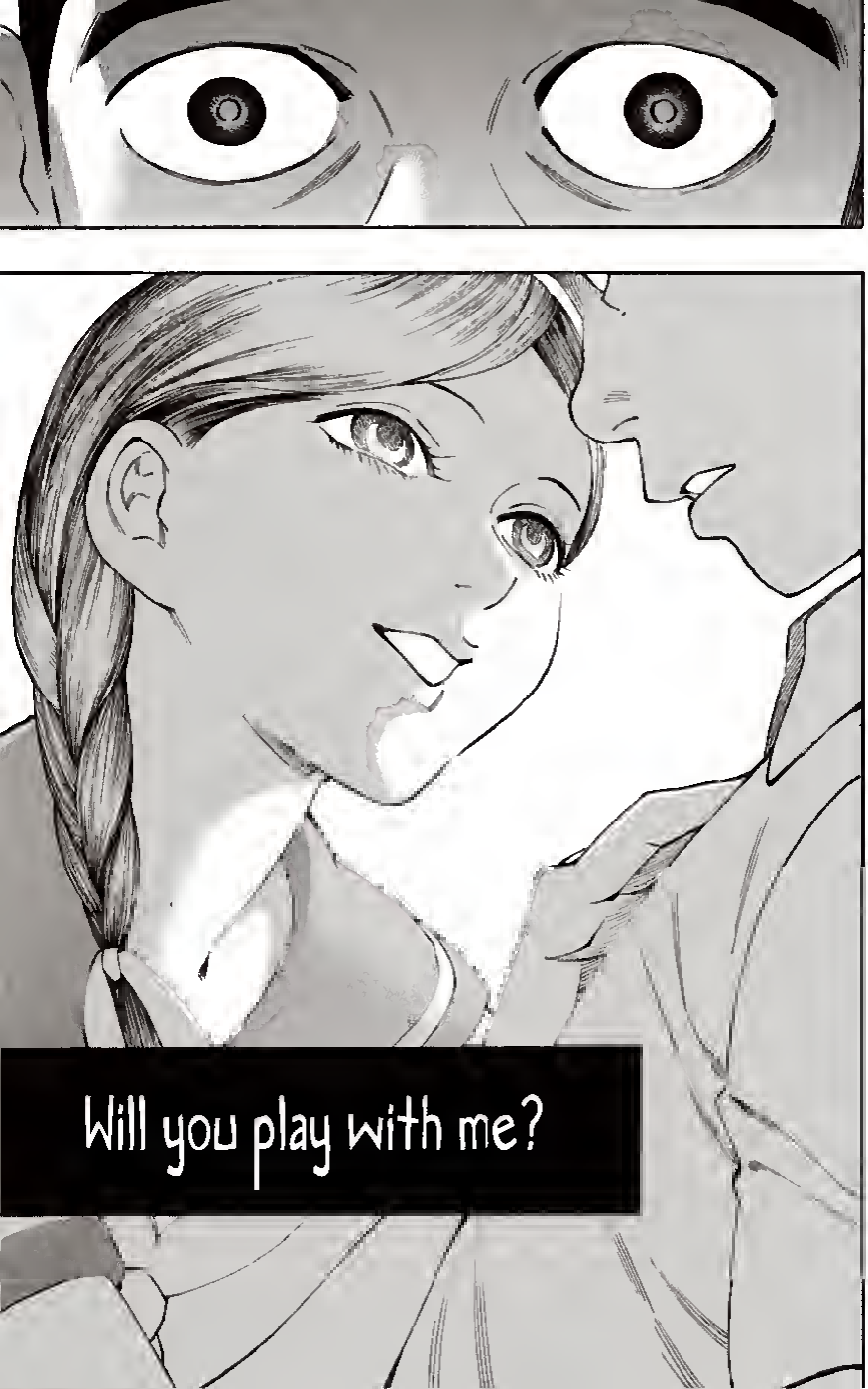

AH, THAT'S RIGHT, DR. HANAOKA SEISHUU USED DATURA IN THE FIRST SURGERY PERFORMED UNDER GENERAL ANAESTHESIA IN JAPAN.
THEY WERE GROWING IN THE GARDEN...
DAT-URA!?


ESSENTIALLY, DATURA HAS LONG BEEN USED AS A WAY FOR MEN TO SATISFY THEIR DESIRES WITHOUT CONSENT.
THE DRUG WAS GIVEN TO GIRLS WHO HAD BEEN SOLD INTO PROSTITUTION...
AS A SIDE EFFECT, THEY'D REMEMBER NOTHING OF THEIR ORDEAL.
IN MEDIEVAL EUROPE, DATURA WAS USED AS AN APHRODESIAC.


RATHER THAN TEST IT ON ONE OF HIS REGULAR PATIENTS, HE CHOSE A BEAUTIFUL GIRL WHO WAS CONVENIENTLY AVAILABLE...
DR. SUGANO MUST HAVE LEARNED HOW TO USE DATURA FROM YOUR FAMILY'S OLD MEDICAL TEXTS.
DATURA CAN ALSO BE USED FOR RELIGIOUS PURPOSES TO INDUCE A TRANCE-LIKE STATE SIMILAR TO DIVINE POSSESSION.

RYOUKO-SAN'S "HOLLOW SPELLS" ARE THE PROOF.
DATURA CAN HAVE SUCH EFFECTS.
THE EFFECTS OF DATURA CAN LAST TWO OR THREE DAYS...
IF DR. SUGANO DRUGGED RYOUKO-SAN, HE COULD HAVE DONE WHAT HE WANTED WITH HER AND NO ONE WOULD HAVE KNOWN...
WHAT!? YOU MEAN SUGANO RAPED MY DAUGHTER!?
W-WAIT A MINUTE, KYOUGOKUDOU!!
YOU CAN'T JUST SAY THINGS LIKE THAT WITH NO EVIDENCE!!
YOU'RE NOT JUST SLANDERING DR. SUGANO, YOU'RE SLANDERING RYOUKO-SAN TOO!!
CALM THE FUCK DOWN, SEKIGUCHI!
LET HIM FINISH!

BUT HER SITUATION WAS UNUSUAL.
CHILDHOOD SEXUAL ABUSE CAN HAVE PROFOUND EFFECTS ON THE VICTIM'S PERSONALITY...
SHE WAS AN EMPTY SHELL... AND THOSE TERRIBLE EXPERIENCES BEGAN TO ACCUMULATE INSIDE HER
SHE WAS ONLY ABUSED WHILE SHE WAS IN AN ALTERED STATE OF CONSCIOUSNESS.
AND A SECOND PERSONALITY WAS BORN.
EVENTUALLY, THE EMPTY SHELL WAS FILLED...

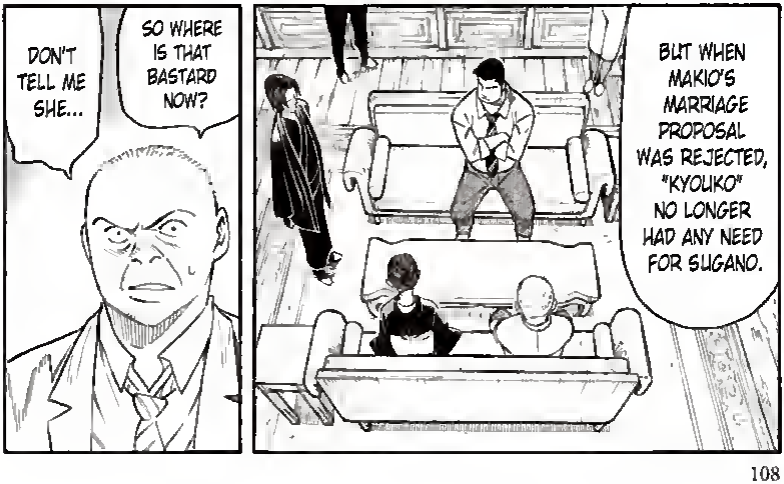

Will you play with me?

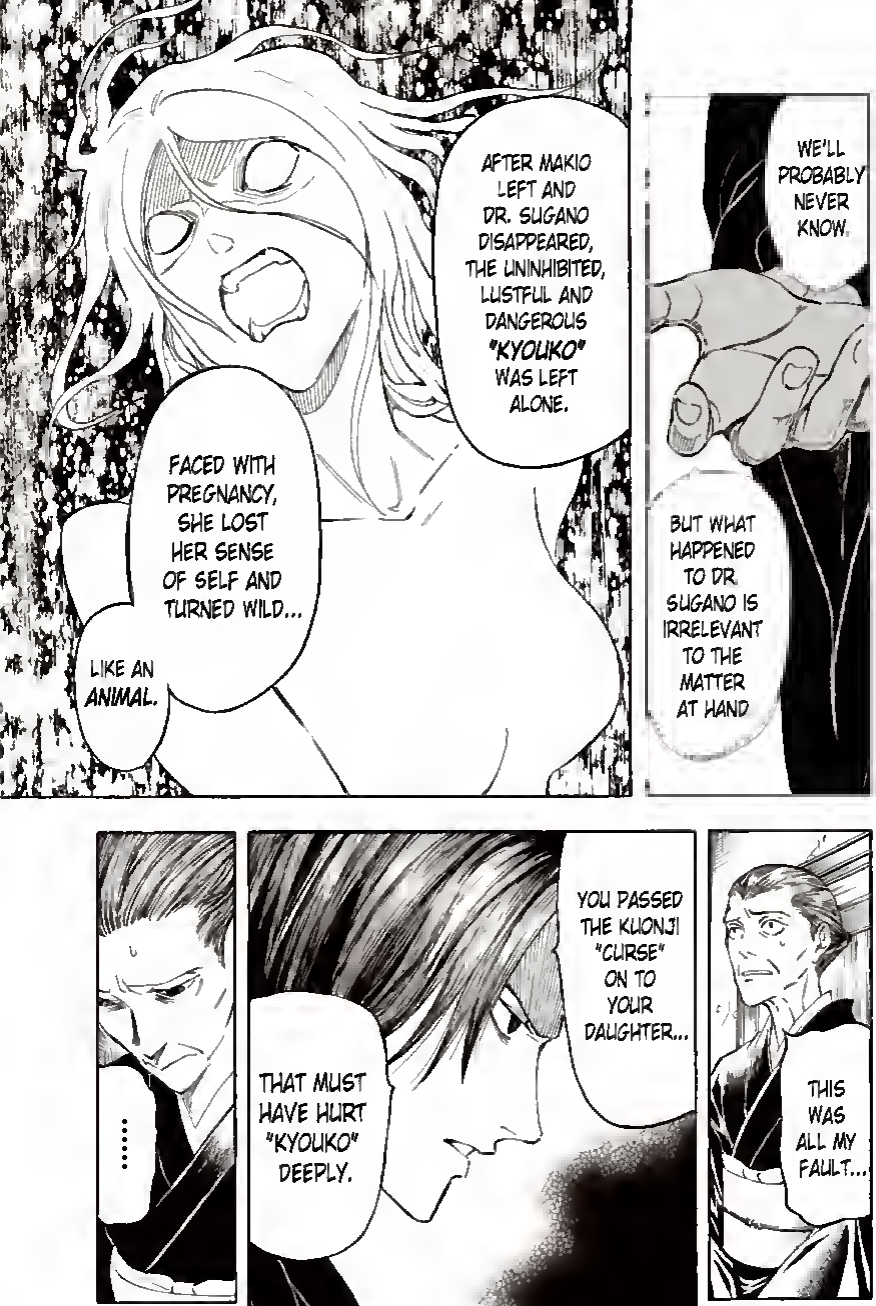
I'M SURE THAT DR. SUGANO WAS DEEPLY ALARMED WHEN HIS DOLL-LIKE VICTIM BEGAN TO DEVELOP A WILL OF HER OWN.
WAS THE LOVE LETTER.
BUT THE CATALYST FOR THAT CHANGE...
To Miss Kuouji Kyouko

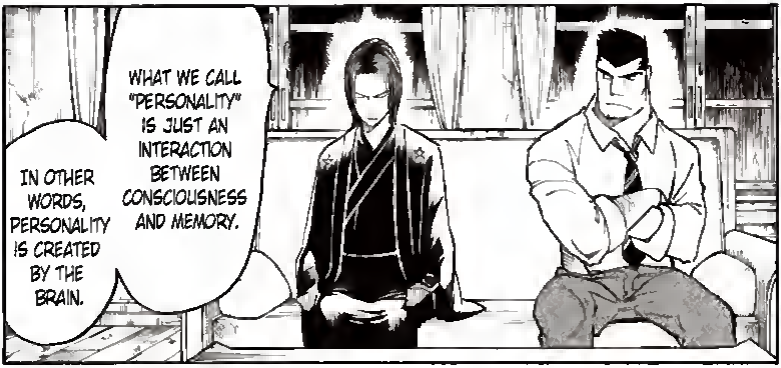
That's right...
I must be Kuonji Kyouko.
To Miss Kuonji Kyouko
That must be a letter for me.

EVEN-TUALLY, DR. SUGANO CAME TO FEAR THIS NEW "KYOUKO."
IF THE TRUTH OF WHAT HE'D DONE EVER GOT OUT, HE'D BE HANGED FOR SURE.
SO SHE HAD A SPLIT PERSON-ALITY...

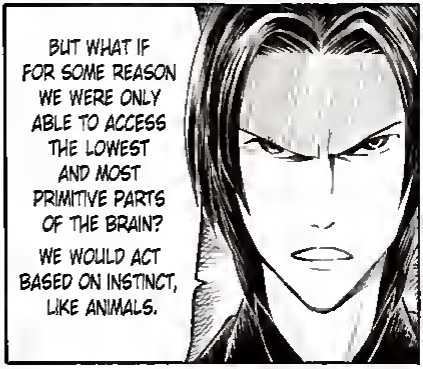
SO HE ALLOWED HER TO USE THE STORAGE ROOM FOR HER CLAN-DESTINE MEETINGS, AND HE EVEN DELIVERED HER LOVE LETTERS.

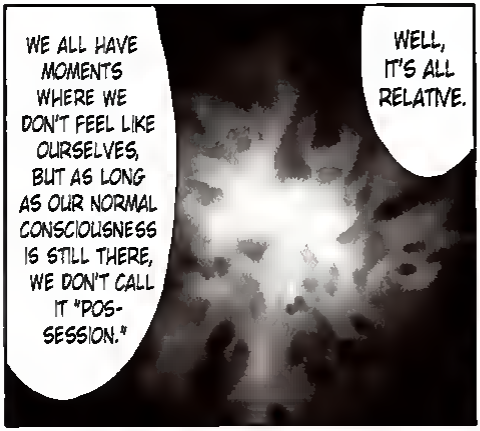

DON'T TELL ME SHE...
SO WHERE IS THAT BASTARD NOW?
BUT WHEN MAKIO'S MARRIAGE PROPOSAL WAS REJECTED, "KYOUKO" NO LONGER HAD ANY NEED FOR SUGANO.


AFTER MAKIO LEFT AND DR. SUGANO DISAPPEARED, THE UNINHIBITED, LUSTFUL AND DANGEROUS "KYOUKO" WAS LEFT ALONE.
FACED WITH PREGNANCY, SHE LOST HER SENSE OF SELF AND TURNED WILD...
LIKE AN ANIMAL.
WE'LL PROBABLY NEVER KNOW.
BUT WHAT HAPPENED TO DR. SUGANO IS IRRELEVANT TO THE MATTER AT HAND
.....
THAT MUST HAVE HURT "KYOUKO" DEEPLY.
YOU PASSED THE KUONJI "CURSE" ON TO YOUR DAUGHTER...
THIS WAS ALL MY FAULT...


WHAT WE CALL "PERSONALITY" IS JUST AN INTERACTION BETWEEN CONSCIOUSNESS AND MEMORY.
IN OTHER WORDS, PERSONALITY IS CREATED BY THE BRAIN.

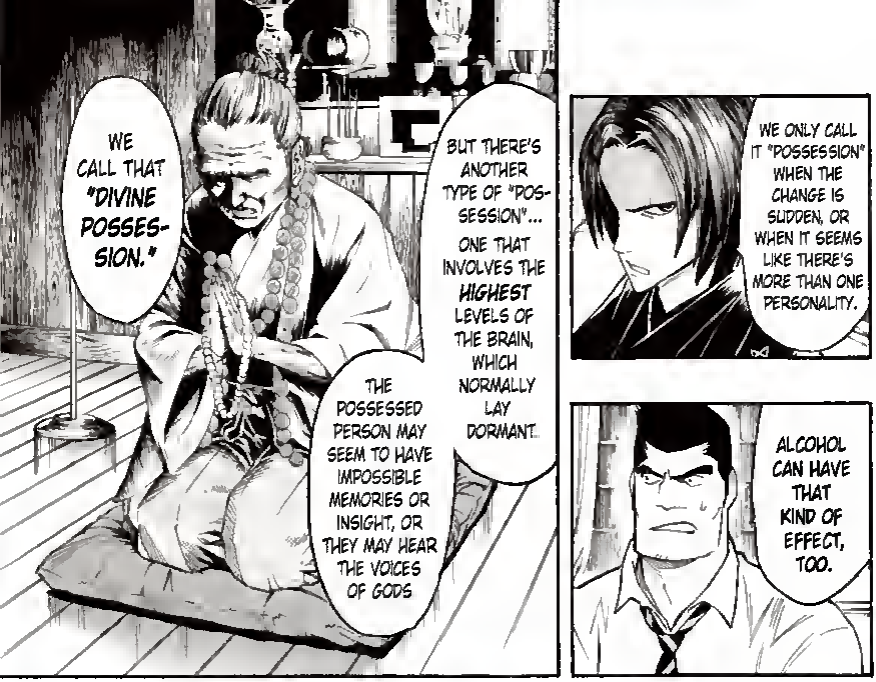
THAT'S WHY THOSE WHO GO MAD ARE SAID TO BE "POSSESSED BY FOX SPIRITS."

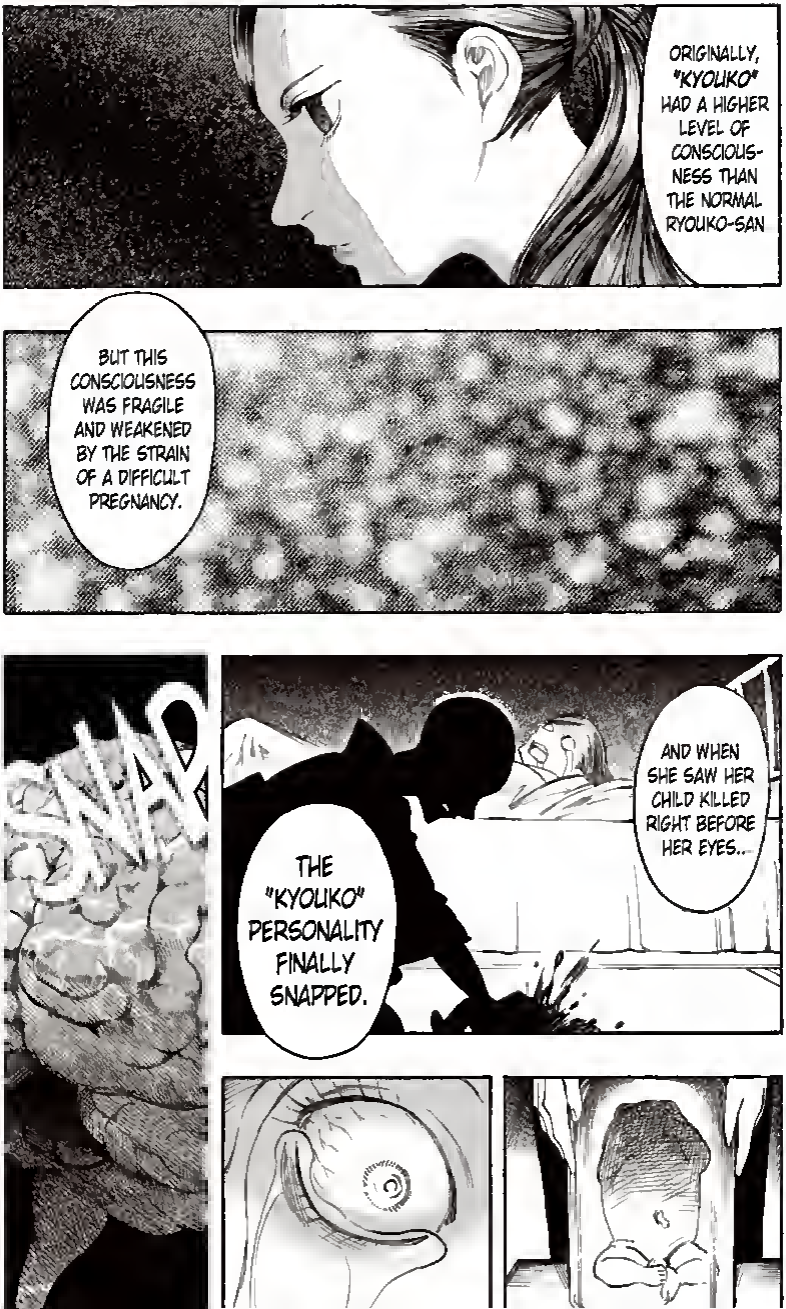

BUT WHAT IF FOR SOME REASON WE WERE ONLY ABLE TO ACCESS THE LOWEST AND MOST PRIMITIVE PARTS OF THE BRAIN?
WE WOULD ACT BASED ON INSTINCT, LIKE ANIMALS.


WE ALL HAVE MOMENTS WHERE WE DON'T FEEL LIKE OURSELVES, BUT AS LONG AS OUR NORMAL CONSCIOUSNESS IS STILL THERE, WE DON'T CALL IT "POSSESSION."
WELL, IT'S ALL RELATIVE.

SO THAT'S WHAT "POSSESSION" REALLY IS?

THAT'S WHAT HAPPENED TO RYOUKO...

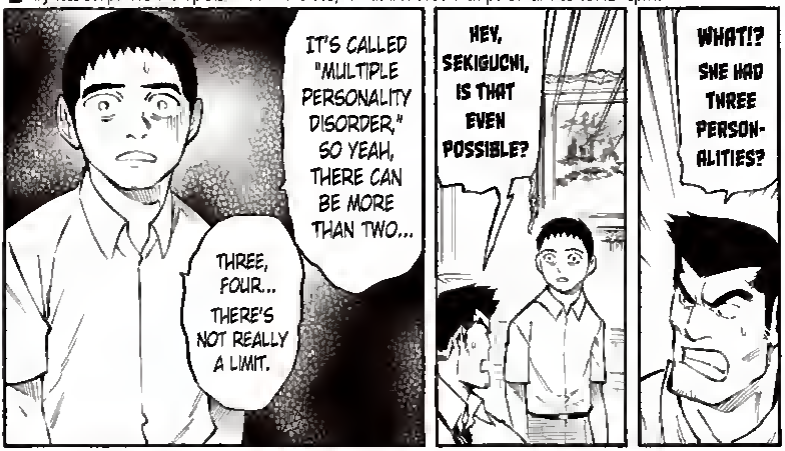

WE CALL THAT "DIVINE POSSESSION."
BUT THERE'S ANOTHER TYPE OF "POSSESSION"... ONE THAT INVOLVES THE HIGHEST LEVELS OF THE BRAIN, WHICH NORMALLY LAY DORMANT.
THE POSSESSED PERSON MAY SEEM TO HAVE IMPOSSIBLE MEMORIES OR INSIGHT, OR THEY MAY HEAR THE VOICES OF GODS
WE ONLY CALL IT "POSSESSION" WHEN THE CHANGE IS SUDDEN, OR WHEN IT SEEMS LIKE THERE'S MORE THAN ONE PERSONALITY.
ALCOHOL CAN HAVE THAT KIND OF EFFECT, TOO.
DIVINE POSSESSION INCLUDES ALL OF THE LOWER ASPECTS OF PERSONALITY.
IN OTHER WORDS, SOMEONE IN A STATE OF DIVINE POSSESSION WILL RETAIN THEIR NORMAL MEMORIES... BUT WHEN THEY COME BACK TO REALITY, THEY'LL BE UNABLE TO REMEMBER WHAT HAPPENED.
SOMEONE IN A STATE OF ANIMALISTIC POSSESSION WILL HAVE NO ACCESS TO THEIR MEMORIES, BUT WHEN THEY RETURN TO NORMAL, THEY MAY REMEMBER SOME OF THE ORDEAL.

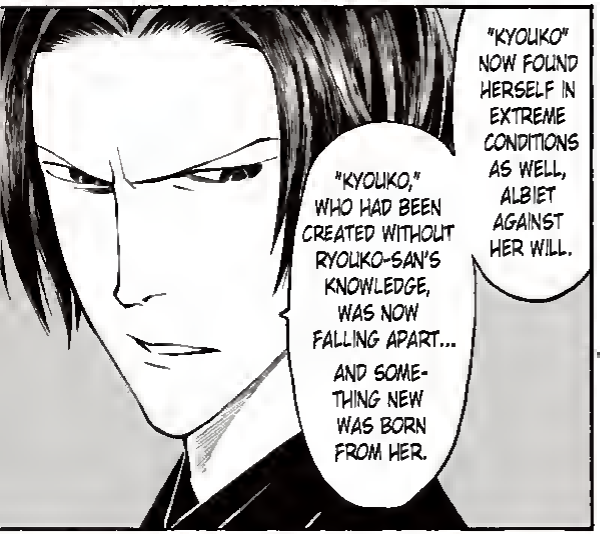

ORIGINALLY, "KYOUKO" HAD A HIGHER LEVEL OF CONSCIOUSNESS THAN THE NORMAL RYOUKO-SAN
BUT THIS CONSCIOUSNESS WAS FRAGILE AND WEAKENED BY THE STRAIN OF A DIFFICULT PREGNANCY.
SNAP
THE "KYOUKO" PERSONALITY FINALLY SNAPPED.
AND WHEN SHE SAW HER CHILD KILLED RIGHT BEFORE HER EYES...

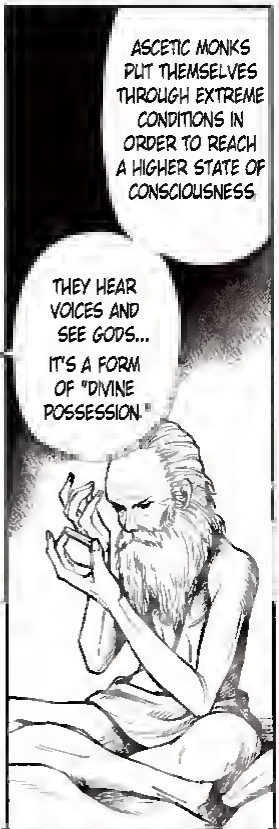
"KYOUKO" BECAME AN ANIMAL, OPERATING ONLY ON INSTINCT.

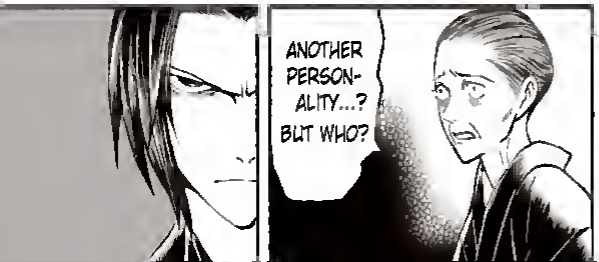
Her mind was completely broken...
BUT THE REAL TRAGEDY WAS WHAT FOLLOWED....
HER MIND... NO, HER BRAIN ITSELF WAS BREAKING.
AHHHHHH
WHEN YOU TIED HER DOWN AND PSYCHO-LOGICALLY TORTURED HER FOR OVER A WEEK.
HOW COULD SHE SAVE HERSELF?
AHHHHH
AH
HOW COULD SHE ESCAPE?
HER BRAIN CREATED A NEW, THIRD PERSONALITY.
THERE WAS ONLY ONE WAY:

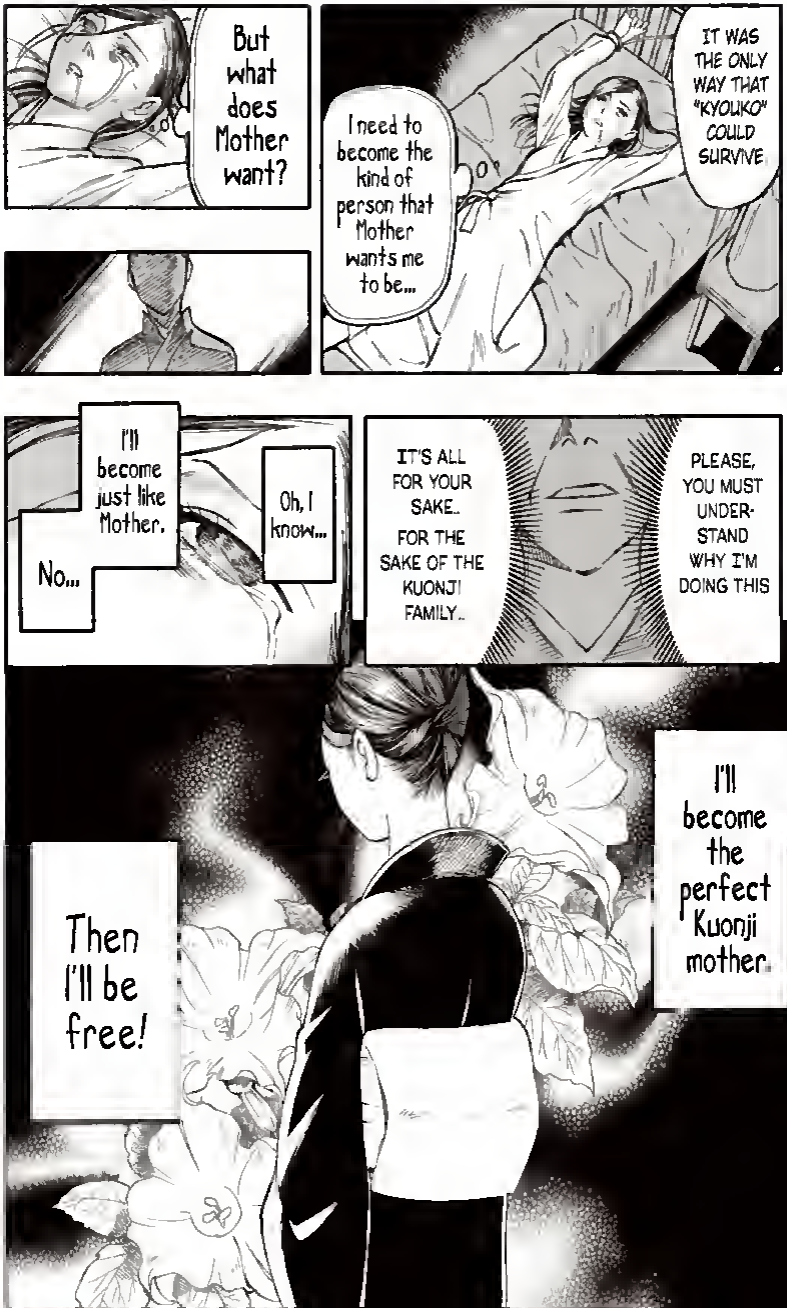
NOTE The days, "multiple personality disorder" is more accurately called "dissociative identity disorder." It's a controversial diagnosis, and psychologists disagree over whether it exists at all. Some experts claim that DID is caused by compartmentalization of traumatic memories, while others say it's just an elaborate form of roleplaying encouraged by less scupulous therapists. But in the 50s, it was believed that personalities could "split."


IT'S CALLED "MULTIPLE PERSONALITY DISORDER," SO YEAH, THERE CAN BE MORE THAN TWO...
THREE, FOUR... THERE'S NOT REALLY A LIMIT.
HEY, SEKIGUCHI, IS THAT EVEN POSSIBLE?
WHAT!? SHE HAD THREE PERSONALITIES?


"KYOUKO" NOW FOUND HERSELF IN EXTREME CONDITIONS AS WELL, ALBIET AGAINST HER WILL.
"KYOUKO," WHO HAD BEEN CREATED WITHOUT RYOUKO-SAN'S KNOWLEDGE, WAS NOW FALLING APART...
AND SOMETHING NEW WAS BORN FROM HER.

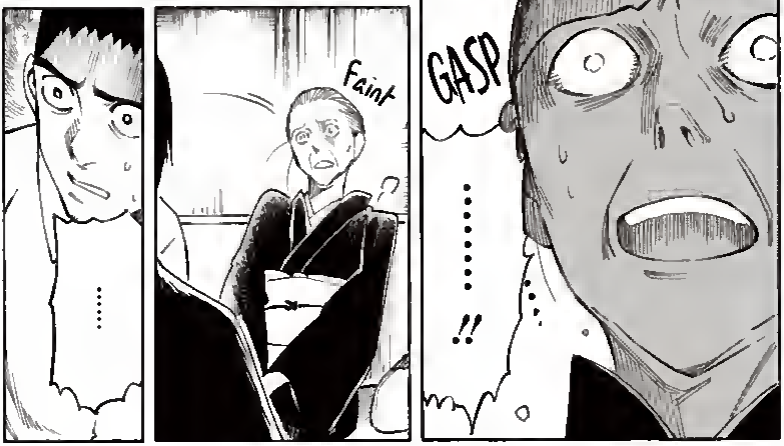

ASCETIC MONKS PUT THEMSELVES THROUGH EXTREME CONDITIONS IN ORDER TO REACH A HIGHER STATE OF CONSCIOUSNESS.
THEY HEAR VOICES AND SEE GODS... IT'S A FORM OF "DIVINE POSSESSION."

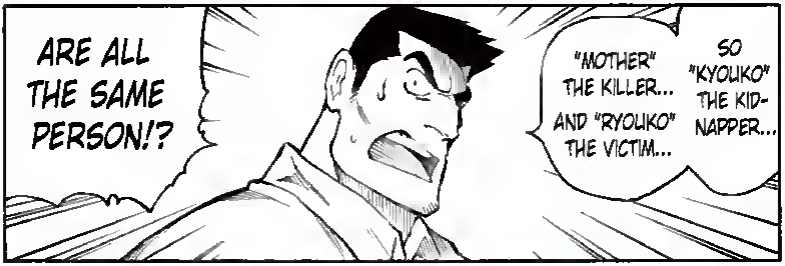


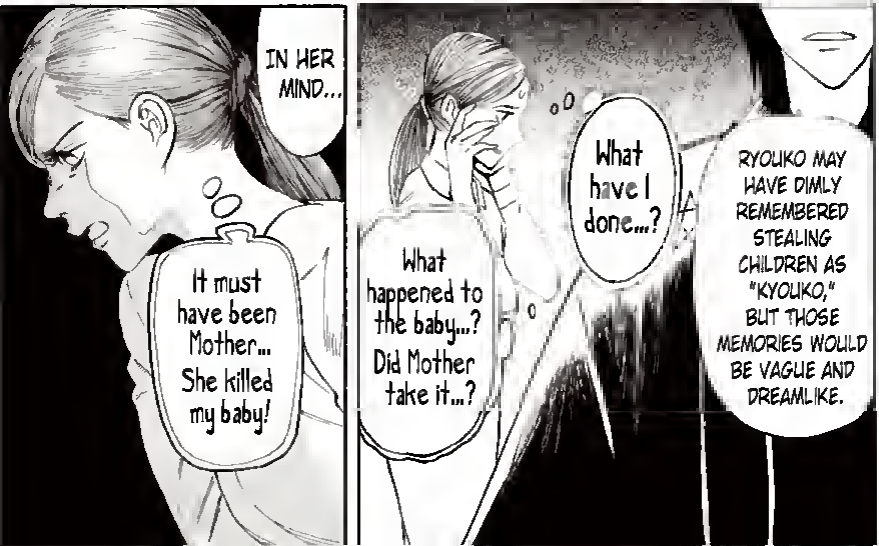

But what does Mother want?
I need to become the kind of person that Mother wants me to be...
IT WAS THE ONLY WAY THAT "KYOUKO" COULD SURVIVE
I'll become just like Mother.
No...
Oh, I know...
IT'S ALL FOR YOUR SAKE.. FOR THE SAKE OF THE KUONJI FAMILY..
PLEASE, YOU MUST UNDER-STAND WHY I'M DOING THIS
I'll become the perfect Kuonji mother.
Then I'll be free!

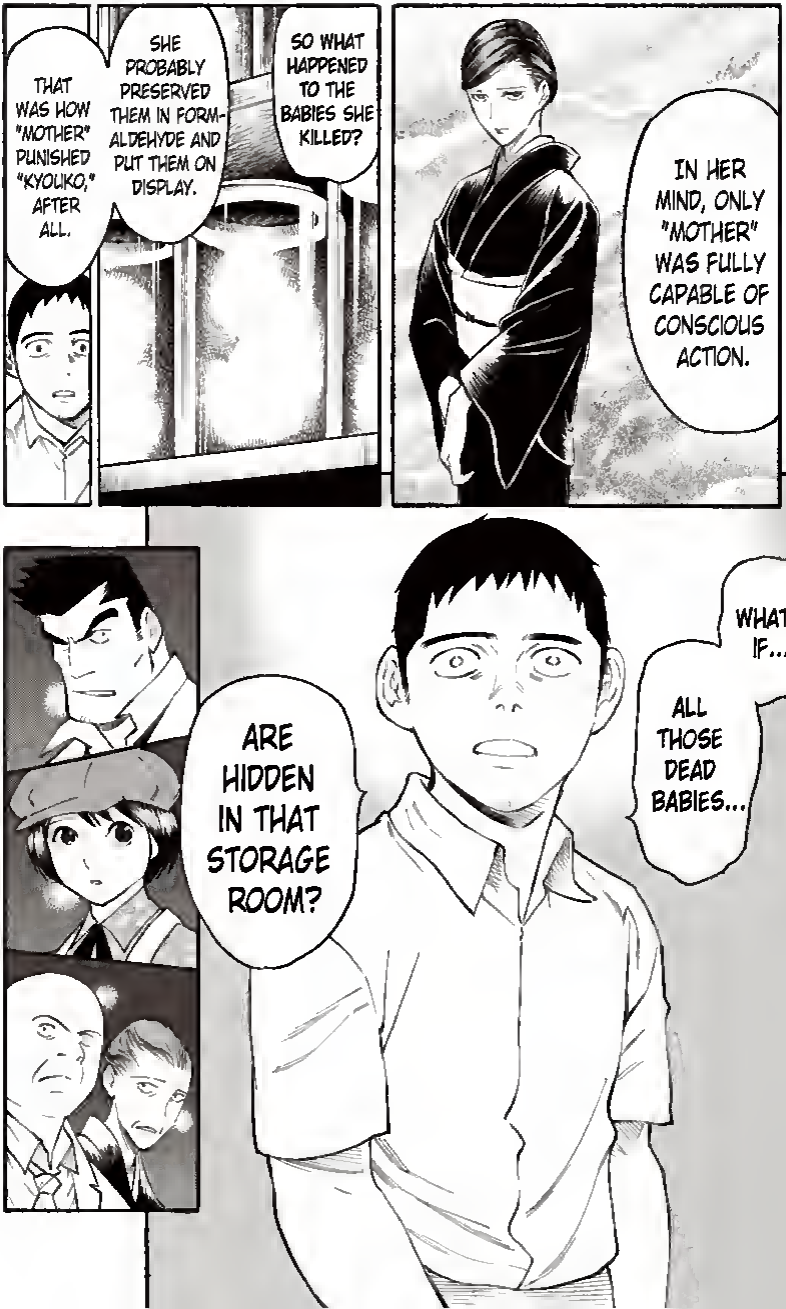
FROM THAT POINT ON, RYOUKO-SAN SPLIT INTO THREE PERSONALITIES: "RYOUKO," "KYOUKO" AND "MOTHER."
BUT ...
WHAT HAPPENED TO MY DAUGHTER?
SO THE ONE WHO STOLE THE BABIES... WAS "KYOUKO?"
YES.
"KYOUKO" WHO HAD REVERTED TO AN ANIMAL-LIKE STATE, ACTED ON HER BASIC MOTHERING INSTINCTS.
HOWEVER, SHE COULDN'T STAY LIKE THAT FOR VERY LONG.
"KYOUKO" MUST HAVE GOTTEN THE DATURA FORMULA FROM DR. SUGANO.
SHE PROBABLY ADMINISTERED IT TO HERSELF.
THE DATURA CHANGED HER...
FROM AN ANIMAL INTO SOMETHING MORE THAN HUMAN.
But that means...
INTO THE PERFECT KUONJI MOTHER.

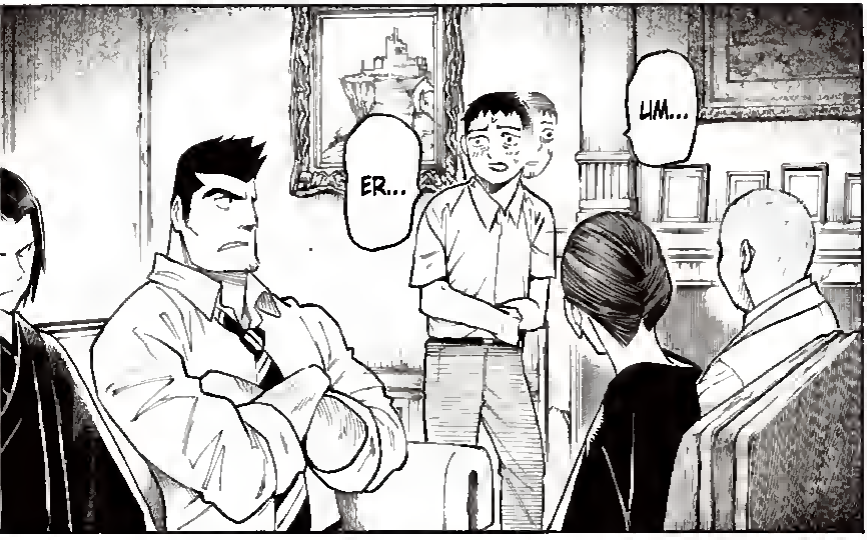
WHAT DOES A KUONJI MOTHER DO WHEN SHE SEES A BABY?
WHAT ARE YOU SAYING!?
SO...
SHE SMASHES IT WITH A ROCK.


Faint
GASP
.....
!!

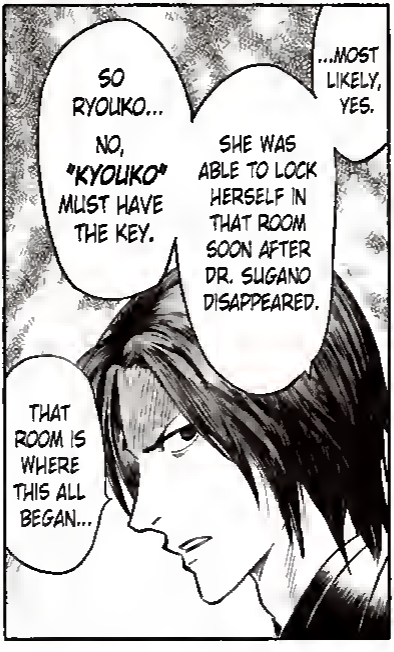

ARE ALL THE SAME PERSON!?
"MOTHER" THE KILLER... AND "RYOUKO" THE VICTIM...
SO "KYOUKO" THE KIDNAPPER...


IN HER MIND...
It must have been Mother... She killed my baby!
What happened to the baby...? Did Mother take it...?
What have I done...?
RYOUKO MAY HAVE DIMLY REMEMBERED STEALING CHILDREN AS "KYOUKO," BUT THOSE MEMORIES WOULD BE VAGUE AND DREAMLIKE.


IN HER MIND, ONLY "MOTHER" WAS FULLY CAPABLE OF CONSCIOUS ACTION.
SO WHAT HAPPENED TO THE BABIES SHE KILLED?
SHE PROBABLY PRESERVED THEM IN FORMALDEHYDE AND PUT THEM ON DISPLAY.
THAT WAS HOW "MOTHER" PUNISHED "KYOUKO," AFTER ALL.
WHAT IF...
ALL THOSE DEAD BABIES...
ARE HIDDEN IN THAT STORAGE ROOM?


ER...
UM...

BUT...
THAT'S INHUMAN!!


THAT ROOM IS WHERE THIS ALL BEGAN...
SO RYOUKO...
NO, "KYOUKO" MUST HAVE THE KEY.
SHE WAS ABLE TO LOCK HERSELF IN THAT ROOM SOON AFTER DR. SUGANO DISAPPEARED.
...MOST LIKELY, YES.

THAT LITTLE CLOSET?
YOU MEAN THE STORAGE ROOM ATTACHED TO THE LIBRARY?

I UNDERSTAND THAT RYOUKO-SAN'S "MOTHER" PERSONA WAS CREATED UNDER EXTREME STRESS,
BUT I CAN'T BELIEVE SHE'D DO SOMETHING SO HORRIBLE WITHOUT THE SLIGHTEST HESITATION!
WHAT KIND OF MOTHER COULD DO SUCH A THING!?
...I CAN THINK OF ONE.
THIS WOMAN RIGHT HERE.
AND SHE DID WHAT HER MOTHER DID BEFORE HER.
BUT...
BUT THAT'S DIFFERENT...

"KYOUKO" AND "MOTHER" EXIST OUTSIDE THE BOUNDARIES OF WHAT IT MEANS TO BE HUMAN.
OUT OF HER THREE PERSONALITIES, ONLY "RYOUKO" HAS A HUMAN CAPACITY FOR REASONING AND EMOTION.
IT'S NOT DIFFERENT AT ALL.
.....
THEY OPERATE ON MORALS THAT WE CAN'T POSSIBLY UNDER-STAND.
He'll untangle the threads of the mystery, and exorcise the demons that possess us.
He's ruthless in his pursuit of the truth.
That man...

That's his role...
In this story.